



Discourses of Value:

The role of power and fields

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The aim of this study is to explore the effects of power relations in value discourse in the field of business. More specifically, the author seeks to understand how fields influence the meanings of polysemic words, how influence can be exercised, and by whom. Data was collected through interviews during and after an E-learning project in which personnel from two companies participated in 2013-2014. E-learning, while it was the project context, is not relevant to the results of the study because the discourse could occur in any number of environments. Analysis was done using a constructivist approach and discourse theory. The results were viewed through four main subject categories, the concepts of 'fields and capital', 'power', 'hegemony and panopticism', and 'description and prescription'. Overall, it is clear that the setting in which discourse occurs, the field, influences meaning. Certain concepts or meanings have greater importance and the origin of this status is explored. Transfer of meaning between two fields was also observed. Further research topics are discussed in the conclusions, as are some of the ramifications of the outcomes of this study.</p>	
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“Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is.” (Marx 1967, pp 578)

1 PROBLEM AREA

In business, it is common practice to highlight various aspects of the final product or service that are beneficial to the buyer or consumer. We see companies using the words, ‘value’ and ‘value-add’ to express this concept of benefit. However, the word ‘value’ is polysemic, i.e. it embodies many concepts (Aschenbrenner 1971) and therefore meanings. As such, the word is indistinct by nature (Smart 1891). This malleability and multiplicity causes the word to pass in conversation without a consensual meaning. However, the final meaning of the word in a business context is dependent upon who is speaking and under what conditions, context, and authority (Van Dijk 1997). More specifically, as Bourdieu articulates:

“the dominant meaning, that is the social meaning attached to it by its dominant social users, may change... by virtue of its objective polysemia, its partial indeterminacy (1990, pp 163).”

This is why the study of discourse and particularly the power in discourse is crucial in understanding how ‘value’ is interpreted and applied. There is a growing interest in studying discourse in organizations (Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli 2010, Hardy, Palmer & Phillips 2000) and particularly the power related to discourse (Mantere, Vaara 2008, Van Dijk 2006, Hardy, Phillips 2004, Oakes, Townley & Cooper 1998, Knights, Morgan 1991). Vaara, et al., in speaking of the discursive nature of strategic texts, say, “they communicate socially negotiated meanings, (and they) legitimate ways of thinking and acting...”

(2010, pp 3). Hardy et al., (2000) demonstrate how discursive actions can lead to strategic change, or simply put, that discourse can bring about change. Power in discourse is a recurring theme in research. Mantere et al., (2008) demonstrate how dominating discourses in strategy work can impede the work, as alternative voices are not allowed. Van Dijk (2006) outlines how a speaker can increase his/her own position, power and credibility through the use of manipulative discourse. Hardy et al., (2004) show how discourse produces a system of power relationships that structures the context in which the action takes place, and Oakes et al., (1998) reveal how a change in discourse and meaning alters the identities and priorities of participants. And finally, Knights and Morgan (1991) are able to establish that, through strategic discourse, relationships of privilege and inequality can be legitimized.

One important element in defining meaning is that it can be descriptive but also prescriptive – that which we describe as the meaning can simultaneously create that which is defined (Bourdieu 1991). Certain hegemonic meanings of ‘value’ can persist and can be seen through compliant actions or processes. This may speak to both conscious deference to power relations and unconscious adherence to behaviour that furthers the goals of those exercising power (Foucault 2001). Finally, awareness – in this case awareness of the polysemic nature of certain words – can be created through inquiry, as in the case of academic research. This does, however, put researchers in a position of changing that which they seek to investigate (Kvale 2006).

These studies all shed light on the importance of acknowledging the role of both power and fields in discourse, and they add up to the focus in this paper, which is to look for instances of discourse occurring in the field of business, wherein power is exercised in interpreting meaning.

2 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to explore the effects of power relations in value discourse in the field of business. This is done through reviewing existing literature combined with an empirical study on the perception of value during an e-learning project. Discourse is a combination of conversations, text, processes, and behaviour related to a concept (Hardy & Phillips, 2004) – in this case the concept of ‘value’. The word ‘field’ is used to mean the environment in which people interact with one another (Bourdieu 1991). The discussion of value occurs within different fields such as work, home, and amongst friends. This discussion can happen in a hotel during vacation with the receptionist, for example. Fields are creations of social, economic, and cultural relations. There are hierarchies of roles and responsibilities within fields as well as rights and expectations (ibid.). As this study looks at media production, we see the seller and buyer interacting in multiple fields that overlap one another and take precedence over one another. For example, the constructed contract comes from the overlapping fields of Law and Human Resources Management, while being under the larger field of economics. The relationships between managers in either company may be constructed in part by their interactions in a different field. There is a certain arbitrariness to labelling fields, but for the purpose of this study, we refer to professional and personal life fields – at work and at home, respectively. The field of work, in this case is within two different companies – an e-learning media production firm, and a logistics firm. The ‘home’ field is essentially interactions with family, friends and acquaintances outside the office.

In the field of media production, before any purchase agreement is signed, there is often a discussion about outcomes, expectations, benefits to be provided, and compensation for the production. Much of this interaction centres on value, which can be articulated in many ways. If 'value' expresses the benefit of a course of action, then within a limited field, there should be agreement and also understanding as to why this meaning is the one a group will accept. As certain concepts of value seem to be valued higher than others, one must explore the power relations at play within the field.

The empirical data is gathered in two firms, through interviews with their senior managers, project managers, and specialists in a specific case situation. This allows me to understand how they talk about the concept of value, as it pertains to a 6-8 month project. This talk I interpret through discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992) and a constructivist approach (Burger, Luckman 1966). Critical discourse analysis is useful here insofar as it focuses on dominance relations by groups and institutions as they are being put into action, or otherwise reproduced by text and talk (Van Dijk 2006).

3 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In this work, I will be discussing the concepts of field, power and value. There are shared fields, such as within a corporation that is selling services to the public, which create overlapping and competing ideas of value. Hierarchies of meaning are dependent upon the field in which they occur and when, and their placement within said hierarchy is a result of power in use (Oakes, Townley & Cooper 1998).

3.1 Field Theory and Capital

For the sake of this paper, Bourdieu's concept of fields is being used to refer to the space or environment in which participants interact with one another in a struggle for and using different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1991). An example would be as an employee in a logistics corporation within the logistics industry, subject to the norms of those fields (corporate and industry). Capital, to Bourdieu, has essentially four forms; Economic, Cultural, Social, and Symbolic (Bourdieu 1986). Economic capital is money or its financial equivalents. Cultural capital is education or skills acquired through schooling or training. Social capital is the aggregate of relationships with others who hold economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital can be understood as reputation or prestige within a community (Bourdieu 1991). Each form of capital can grant power to one who exercises dominance over another to achieve outcomes suitable to the dominator (Oakes, Townley & Cooper 1998).

3.2 Power

Power is the exercise of capital by a person or group over another person or group (Foucault 1980). For example, a CEO at a logistics firm, in contradiction to short-term profitability goals, may instruct a middle manager to take a loss on a certain client because of a long-term relationship between the CEO and the customer's Managing Director. Using social capital in this way may decrease economic capital of the firm, but may benefit the CEO in the future, either economically, socially, or symbolically (Bourdieu 1980). In terms of customer satisfaction and loyalty, it may actually increase the long-term economic benefits, as the customer may buy more next year, offsetting the short-term loss. The above example of the CEO is clear – simply put, the middle manager is instructed by

his superior to work against short-term goals. Compliance can be enforced through power relations, i.e. losing his job, the middle manager's economic (and possibly social) capital would decrease and therefore economic capital is the source of the CEO's power in this field at a particular moment. In contrast, the Executive Board could invite the manager to take an extensive upgrading course in Financial Management, which would increase his cultural capital and could be exchanged for economic capital. With the new education, the manager could seek a promotion or a new job elsewhere, for more money. The fact that the Board can exert positive power over subordinates does not cancel the role as a dominator and employees place as the dominated (Wood 2007).

One element of power and its use is that it is not always attributable to an individual or ruling group. Certain structures, processes, and norms are so common that they become instruments of a dominant group, without that group choosing consciously to dominate (Foucault 1980). The processes have evolved over time due to the needs and desired goals of, for example, shareholders, owners, and board members – a class of people who direct companies. At some point, the processes became norms and standards, as in the case of national and international accounting rules, certifications of firms' quality programmes, and statements of credit worthiness. Although these norms that dictate behaviour and processes within firms are not meant as tools of subjectification, they nonetheless require compliance, and in some cases that compliance can be coerced through fines and penalties by the State. The class of board members and owners benefit from the evolution of processes to norms to laws, as a dominant class that enacts strategies to achieve their aims. Oddly enough, this dominant class must also adhere to the laws. This creates an environment where it is difficult to label someone as personally responsible for the creation of

subjectifying norms, and this is where hegemonic concepts are embodied, come to life so to speak.

3.3 Hegemony and Panopticism

Hegemony is a form of rule whereby a dominant state rules other states through structures of indirect power, or the threat of force (Oxford University Press 2013). Those structures can be found in the dominated state in the form of civil institutions, government, police, bureaucracy, etc., and although run and staffed by members of the dominated state, nonetheless further the aims of the dominant state. Military force is not used to coerce populations, but punishment, imprisonment, sanctions and fines are used, as is the threat of force. How ideas become hegemonic is through cultural dominance. Within capitalist business environments, sanctions and fines can be used to force compliance to financial and accounting norms, certifications, licenses, and standards, which further the goals of a dominant class.

Panoptic means that one can see all that is visible in one view, or being able to see all that happens (Foucault 1977). Years ago, when I was visiting Bordeaux Prison, built in 1912 in Montreal, Canada, I experienced embodied panopticism. On the third floor of the central tower was a round room with windows facing out into each of the pinwheel arms of the cell wings. Standing there, it was possible to see what was happening in all of the common areas without the prisoners knowing that you were watching. But the power of panopticism is not that someone is watching all the time. Rather it is that someone could be watching at any time, and non-compliance to rules and norms will earn punishment. In a way, the field of business has a spirit of panopticism, or embodied panopticism, through the use of norms and regulations that are hegemonic and benefit a ruling class.

Where it differs from prison life is that participants in the field cooperate with enforcement (i.e. self-discipline and subjectification of others) by choice and not by enacted court order (Oakes, Townley & Cooper 1998).

Michel Foucault speaks of the nature of panopticism as follows:

"[The] peculiarity of the disciplines [elements of Panopticism] is that they try to define in relation to the multiplicities a tactics of power that fulfils three criteria: firstly, to obtain the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost (economically, by the low expenditure it involves; politically, by its discretion, its low exteriorization, its relative invisibility, the little resistance it arouses); secondly, to bring the effects of this social power to their maximum intensity and to extend them as far as possible, without either failure or interval; thirdly, to link this 'economic' growth of power with the output of the apparatuses (educational, military, industrial or medical) within which it is exercised; in short, to increase both the docility and the utility of all elements of the system" (1977, pp 218)

Those three elements, lowest cost, highest efficacy, and increased utility, are dimensions of panopticism that can simultaneously be hegemonic principles in business.

3.4 Descriptive and prescriptive

Symbolic Power is in the relationship between dominant and dominated individuals, groups, and institutions within a field or fields. This symbolic power gains its efficacy through a degree of deference and acquiescence on the part of the dominated towards the dominant. For example, during a christening ceremony in a church, in which a child is dabbed with some water and words of invocation are spoken, the priest describes and prescribes at the same time. The child is described as being a member, s/he *ought to be* a

member, of the religious or spiritual community, but is simultaneously prescribed, *to be* a member. The invocation brings about the new state, through recognition by the parents of the priest's role and authority to make what he says come into being (Bourdieu 1991).

Description and prescription are also found in how meaning is granted to words in the field of business. If there is a prevailing expression (within a field) of the value of certain outcomes, and preferred processes to achieve outcomes, this expression informs an observer of the localized meaning of that word, localized for that particular field, for instance the field of business or the field of home. If importance is granted to one meaning amongst many, then that is the preferred meaning which prescribes the outcome desired as the most valued. We can see in Bourdieu's concept the practice of marking an act both descriptively valuable and, through discourse, including practice, prescriptively valuable. An example would be the monthly close and reporting in the finance department of a large firm. Each department head can be responsible for his or her own profit and loss, revenue, fixed costs, variable costs, and achievement of targets. The targets inform one of the desired outcomes within this field of finance and accounting within the firm. Examples could include the gross margin (GM), the earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT), or even the company-wide return on capital employed (ROCE). However, if there are other outcomes that are stated as being relevant to management, such as customer satisfaction (measured in claims per 1000 items), or employee engagement (measured in sick days), and environmental targets related to emissions and recycling, we are then presented with a wide range of outcomes for motivating action. The above are descriptive – they describe what is valuable to the firm. And when one sees what is actually tracked and acted upon by the senior managers and Board Members, one can place the outcomes in a hierarchy of value. Those goals or targets described as valuable become through

prescription the most valuable outcomes. Taken a bit further, if the CEO consistently acts upon the monthly and quarterly financials, and does not act on other indicators, then s/he, or the dominant group, has prescribed what is valuable and what is not valuable, to the dominated group. This is a simplistic explanation, but it does allow a certain understanding of how processes and norms can inform descriptive and prescriptive practices within a power discourse of ‘value’.

Myrdal (2013) speaks of how key words used in the field of business have a dual character – that of being both descriptive and prescriptive. This can actually have an effect on the way in which words are used by those in a dominant position, and those who are dominated by the implications of meaning.

These theories take me to the research question: What are the effects of power relations in value discourse in the field of business? What are the different meanings of ‘value’ in different fields and how does choosing meaning later affect behaviour? In order to answer these questions, a study was made in two companies I shall refer to as “C1” and “C2”.

4 METHODOLOGY

The two companies in the study are very different. One is a small e-learning and media production company with approximately 10 staff, while the other is a large, multinational with 25,000 employees and offices in 14 countries. Both are headquartered in Finland, and the project that forms the basis for this study was the provision of e-learning modules to support the roll-out of a new hand-held device to approximately 3000 drivers, warehouse workers, and terminal workers.

As valuable as corporate texts online or in print can be, interviews were the primary source for this study because I was looking for articulation and contrasting of a word –

albeit an important one – in contexts that are not covered by corporate texts, ie., home, personal life, etc. From written material directly related to the project, and from publicly available information, a semi-structured outline was produced for the interviews. The core team of the project included managers from both companies who were acting as liaisons between executives and specialists within their own firms. The responsibility to move the project forward rested with these project managers, while the specialists gave input as to scope, parameters, limitations and expectations. The executives had overall responsibility for the end results, and the allocation of resources to this project. Table 1 lists the interviewees and duration of the interview.

Table 1. Interview participants and duration

Role	C2 Ltd. Interviews duration	C1 Ltd. Interviews duration
Executive (E1)	17 minutes	
Executive (E2)		54 minutes
Project Manager (PM1)	21 minutes	
Project Manager (PM2)	44 minutes	
Project Manager (PM3)		51 minutes
Specialist (S1)	41 minutes	
Specialist (S2)	46 minutes	
Specialist (S3)	26 minutes	
Specialist (S4)		30 minutes

All interviews were recorded and transcribed in English, as the majority of answers were in English. Some assistance was required with translations of certain words from Finnish, both during the interviews and afterwards. Once the interviews were complete, work was done to compare and correlate the responses, keeping in mind the questions that gave rise to this study. As I was not sure what I would find, I approached the data with a spirit of exploration and used inductive logic to gain understanding. My approach to the study was broadly constructivist (Burger, Luckman 1966), which means that meanings and understandings are created in social realms, rather than as objective truths. I started by searching for patterns and themes, which I then compared with the theory. For example, this entailed comparing the executives' responses with one another, with their own staff, and with relevant theory. This process was maintained throughout the interview analysis. When certain patterns arose, as was the case, an attempt was made to consolidate those responses. On the other hand, if responses could not be consolidated and an individual

held opinions that were at odds with their superiors, colleagues, or firm's literature, this too was noted. In either case, exploring theory that would open up the responses for deeper interpretation. I ensured a triangulation of the data by comparing the interview notes with company documents, AND by going back to the interviewees afterwards to clarify and ensure interpretations.

4.1 Interviews

Interviews were chosen as the means to gain information within the relationship between two companies' employees on a single project of 6-10 months. This method of data-gathering can capture linguistic cues, sub-text, and spontaneous expressions of meaning that are not apparent in corporate text and approved presentations, process descriptions in manuals, or communications originating from the companies themselves. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, as there was a written list of questions (see Appendix 1), but it was possible to deviate from the questions when relevance or time dictated a change. For example, although scheduled for 45 minutes, some interviewees had half that time to meet, while others had one hour. This was controlled by the person being interviewed.

The questionnaire had five parts. The first task was to establish relationship and identity, by asking about the interviewee's position, title, tenure, and roles and responsibilities. Secondly, I wanted to discuss the firm, what it does and why, so that the project in question could be placed in a larger framework of targets and goals of a firm. Thirdly, we discussed the project itself; the processes, meetings, planning, development and execution. The fourth point was related to a general understanding of the word value and its

synonyms (see Appendix 2). Lastly, I questioned the use of the word value in their private lives, and how they would express value in other terms.

Before beginning the interviews, I requested written text, Internet pages, project descriptions, and other company material. This was done so that after the interviews were complete, it would be possible to compare the written word with the spoken word. Also, it seemed important to be able to understand the two groups of employees in context, in their firms, as it would relate to the project in question.

4.1.1 Influence on the interviewees

One point that should be made here is that interviews have their own power relations. As an employee of C2, at the time of the project planning and initial roll-out, and an external contractor for C1, I was in the position of sitting in both ‘camps’, so to speak. I had complete access to all members involved, in both firms, and had worked with the senior and middle managers for periods of 2-6 years. Bias, in the form of trying to balance my need for information with my roles and responsibilities in either firm, had to affect some of the questioning. Remaining completely impartial, although possible, is not probable.

An interviewer has a dominant position in the field of the interview. He decides what the topic will be, and how the process of collecting information will be done. He steers the conversation by emphasizing certain questions, following conceptual lines, skipping non-pertinent information which may be of interest to the interviewee, and controlling the pace and depth of the interview, to a large degree (Kvale 1996). It is apparent that the prejudices and pre-conceived ideas of the interviewer can lead to questions of data quality. One must note, too, that the benefit of the interview falls to the dominant party, as he is able to write, publish, and potentially gain in cultural and economic capital as a result

of the research done. The interviewee may not receive similar benefits. So the created environment in which the interview takes place, with its façade of dialogue, may be masking embodied power (Kvale 2006). It is in fact not a dialogue where the parties are on equal footing. As such, Kvale says “the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation” (2006, pp 484) and in the end is the arbiter of what was or was not meaningful. He or she is also the interpreter of what was meant when others spoke.

Another issue is that through the interview process, the interviewer and interviewee are also creating new knowledge. This is done by discussing, questioning, and clarifying (Kvale 1996). Some questions challenge the interviewee’s views and thinking in that it may provide the first opportunities to relate ideas to behaviour, in this particular topic or issue. As Kvale states, the “interviewer uses him- or herself as a research instrument” (1996, pp121) and this role cannot be considered neutral. By studying something through interaction, as is required in any kind of ethnographical study or in interviews, the researcher is affecting, is having an influence over, that which is being researched. This can lead to benefits in that the interviewee may walk away with new perspectives, ideas, and behaviours, and this is why interviewing can be a method of creation, and not simply a method of discovery.

5 CASE DESCRIPTION

This study includes interviews with employees of two companies in Helsinki, Finland. One is a logistics firm (called C2 Ltd), specializing in warehousing and trucking, with approximately 3500 truckers and warehouse staff requiring training in a new piece of equipment – a handheld scanner and interface device – called ‘Kati’. The other firm (called C1 Ltd), with approximately 10 full-time, part-time, and external contract staff,

provides e-learning modules and media services, such as internal videos, external marketing videos and interactive presentations to firms in Finland.

As C2 had acquired a large competitor in recent years, it was necessary to integrate several I.T. systems into one. An outcome of that integration was the need to change and harmonize processes, as well as equipment used in the trucks, terminals, and warehouses across the entire company in Finland. That equipment, as mentioned, came to be called 'Kati'. It is a handheld device, with software and interface built for C2. The original roll-out date for 'Kati' was week 48 – the last week of November 2013. Given this schedule, discussions were opened with several e-learning companies in the spring of 2013, and C1 Ltd won the bid. Starting in August 2013, C1 and C2 began meeting to create an e-learning platform that would include the modules for learning how to use 'Kati', and also hosting of the modules on internal and external servers, as not all workers had access to the C2 intranet.

E-learning is understood within both companies as a web-based, modular, audio/visual presentation that can have several outcomes depending on intent. In this case, the desired outcome was that drivers and other staff would know how to use the new equipment. Normally, e-learning takes place when an individual sits in front of a laptop or desktop computer and 'goes through' the material by clicking, scrolling, reading, and in some cases, taking a small quiz afterwards.

I began discussing this research project with the senior managers at C2 in the autumn of 2013, at which time I was told the project was delayed. I received permission to start my research in January 2014. At this point, the roll-out of the e-learning modules had not begun, and the devices' software was not yet ready. The initial offering material and presentation, as well as presentations and meeting material from the first 6 months of the

project were sent to me, and I developed my interview based on the 5-step outline described above in the ‘Interview’ section.

Re-scheduled for roll-out in February, the project was delayed again due to the software subcontractor and internal I.T. integrations. Initial piloting and roll-out began in March 2014. That said, there were changes needed at the last minute to the e-learning modules, as much of the visual content of the modules was based on the screen shots of the ‘Kati’ device, which only became available at a later date than expected. The changes to the e-learning were done without affecting the schedule for training and roll-out significantly, if at all.

5.1 Interviews

The participants held various positions in two companies, including senior executives, Development, Sales, ICT, Production, and Human Resource managers or supervisors. They were separated into three categories; Executive, Project Manager, and Specialist. The idea behind this categorization is ownership (Senior Executives), responsibility (Project Managers), and consultancy (Development, Sales, ICT, Production and HR). The last group, which I refer to as the ‘Specialist’ class, also contains the end users and producers – in production roles. Production has input on what the deliverables can be, from the Supplier side, and have to be, from the Buyer side, in the final roll-out. Because their staff will be creating, implementing and/or using the new equipment, the production staff have a certain power to veto ideas that simply do not work in their environment. The Project Managers are liaisons between the Executives and the Specialist staff of both firms, while Executives are responsible for the overall outcomes and fiduciary responsibilities.

Interviews took place (in almost all cases) in the offices of the interviewee. In one case, it was in a café. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, and the interviews were subsequently transcribed to a written document. As some portions of each interview occurred in Finnish, it was necessary to translate some words and phrases with the help of a native speaker. The timing of the interviews was chosen to be from April 25th to May 15th as this was the end of the initial roll-out of the first wave of ‘Kati’ handhelds. It was also after the first round of trainings with the truck drivers. Although included in initial discussions, the warehouse and terminal e-learning modules had not yet been completed and the handhelds (and/or corporate systems) were not yet ready to take over these processes, at the time of the interviews.

6 FINDINGS

After speaking with the core team members of the project and analyzing their responses to open-ended questions related to work and private life, I began parceling parts of the conversation into what I felt were meaningful segments. These were then compared to concepts and theories. I separated the data into categories entitled ‘Field Theory and Capital’, ‘Power’, ‘Hegemony and Panopticism’, and ‘Descriptive and Prescriptive’. The results are below.

6.1 Field Theory and Capital

When the interviews were completed, it was obvious that the field affected a change in meaning or expression of ‘value’. As one respondent’s remarked:

“The only time the word value is used in private life, is when talking about money.

It is related to customers...only to paying customers.”

She followed this up with an example from her renovation project at home in which she was the buyer of services. One company did a great job on the kitchen and another did a poor job on the living room. The ‘value-add’ of the first company was much higher than the second, in her opinion, because it increased the financial value of her home. Contrast this with her description of value in private life:

“The most important thing in my life is my grandchildren. I always tell them that they bring me so much happiness...that I enjoy them so much. That is value-add for me.”

We see that ‘value’ is a financial increase within work or commercial relationships, while in private life it can be expressed as ‘happiness’ and ‘enjoyment’.

An Executive from C2 made his views very clear when asked to clarify the word ‘value’ as it relates to private and work life:

“(Value?) It’s quality time, with my wife. I guess it’s also the way you do things, the way you think you want to do things. The way you treat people... All that. That is value for me. ...in the end, in business, it’s always related to money. In the business world, it’s money behind that word, always in the end. If someone says something else, it’s bullshit. And then at home it’s different.”

Bourdieu’s concept of capital, as it applies to work life, can be a straightforward exercise of position (1991). In private life, it can be amorphous, but one Specialist was able to articulate an example of this when discussing helping friends:

“[Value] is on the background of everything, not only business life, but anytime you are exchanging something. Money. Or helping your friend to move, for example. You are helping create value for your friend, that he doesn’t have to carry

so much, and for you that you maybe get more bonded to your friend, or at some point you can ask help from your friend...it's like exchanging services. It's like social capital. You could do it like charity. But usually, with friends, it's like putting money in the bank when you help them, and even if you don't cash it out, it's still social capital."

The implication of a change in fields is fairly obvious. Value, as a concept and a word, has a place in speech at work. At home, the word was rarely if ever used but the concept was accepted. In work life, the word 'value' was not related to individuals, but rather to business processes or tools and equipment, while at home, it left the process or product realm and was experienced through relationships – mostly with family members or friends.

It is not so clear how capital comes into play. At work, customers have economic capital and therefore are able to dictate what is important to them. However, without further questioning, it is difficult to see whether or not the Executive's opinion regarding the primacy of money is also an example of exercised capital. It is not apparent in the interviews that he using his social and cultural capital within the office to direct his subordinates towards certain understandings of 'value'. Adding doubt to a direct use of his capital was that a Project Manager used two of the same synonyms to describe 'value', as the Executive in question. However, the Executive had only been in his position for a few months and the two of them had not met to discuss this project or participated in a discussion on value, so the Project Manager did not obtain her interpretation from the Executive. That said, the general consensus of the respondents regarding the word 'value' at work speaks to a hegemonic idea.

6.2 Power

The use of capital, in whatever form, is to benefit the party exercising it (Bourdieu 1991). In this study, there was no example of active use of capital between the executives, the project managers and the specialists, to clarify meaning. Of course, specialists would have had input to the project managers that dictated future steps, in terms of Human Resource practice, training requirements, technical specifications or parameters. At the same time, the Executives of both companies must have their own general guidelines regarding commitments of money, time, and personnel, as well as overall schedule and outcomes. An interesting point is that the C2 project managers changed mid-project, as did the C2 Executive, and one of the C2 specialists. The participants were shown a list of synonyms for the word 'value' and asked to choose 3 words that embody or express their understanding of 'value'; the results are shown in the below Figure 1:

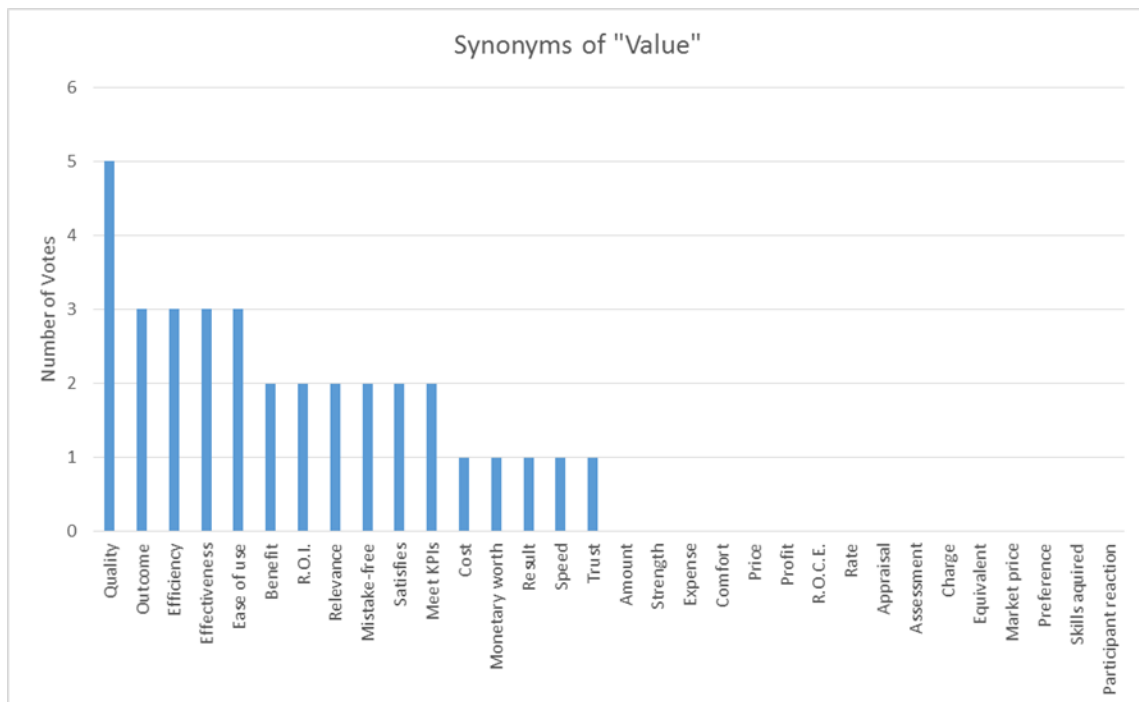


Figure 1. Choosing synonyms of 'value'

The most common response was 'quality', but during the two and six years I worked for either company, I did not hear this direct rendering from 'value'. Quality was discussed, as were other concepts, but not explicitly as a synonym for something else. 'Value' could mean many things, as the list of 30 plus synonyms indicated (see Appendix 2). The fact that so many participants chose the same meaning without dialogue from a higher level executive or supervisor suggests that the synonymous association originates elsewhere. Foucault (1980) suggests that power is not always exercised by an individual or a group, but may be the result of embedded practices that have evolved over time. This evolution or growth starts as a simple preference that benefits a decision-maker. Later, it may move from process to a standard across a field. In this study, it is apparent that most of the participants share a consensual understanding of the word 'value' as it is used in the field of work, that it means 'quality', but it is not clear from the interviews that this is due to an exercise of power by an individual or group. It seems to exist without an originator deliberately instituting it. As with 'value', the word 'quality' is polysemic, and therefore subject to much of the ambiguity one experiences with 'value'.

6.3 Hegemony and Panopticism

As the concept of value was not being articulated from the top down, from specific executives to their subordinates, the interviewees suggested other origins. When discussing the origins of 'value' and 'value-add', or its meaning in the field of business, there were two camps. One group actually used the term 'squirrel skins' to refer to the time before coins and paper money. In Finland, people traded squirrel skins or were able to trade staples like flour and sugar with a common value related to squirrel skins. This is similar

in North America to the practice of valuing goods in relation to beaver pelts, as was done during the European exploration and colonization of the continent. The C2 Executive elaborated on this point:

“I’d guess it’s from those times. You have skins and then you have something, some kind of value to give it and, to give the skin away for something else. Some kind of value that you get for exchange of the skin.”

A C2 Specialist went even further back in history:

“I feel that it has been in the background all the way from when people started to exchange things. When they started to exchange some leather (skins) for services as exchange. It was already at that point.”

These responses suggest that the concept of adding value is ancient, but does not answer from where we have taken the actual word into use. Another group of respondents referred to a different source that is somehow significantly younger. One said:

“American business theory.”

While another seemed to take her time before replying:

“Business school, may be the first place I heard it.”

One Executive discussed at length how the concept of value is natural to relationships in the family, but then when asked to clarify the use of the phrase, ‘value-add’, she began by talking about parents with pre-school aged children, and the decisions they make regarding hobbies, exposure to music, and how this adds value to a child’s life. She closed her comments with the following:

“It is entering our society, as we are more individuals... We are more global. It is in the culture. Having to find the value add, is becoming more normal.”

Regardless of origin, the concept of ‘value’ and ‘value-add’ can be seen as hegemonic in the sense that it permeates our thinking vis-à-vis money and relationships in our private life, and it informs employees of a distinct meaning in the work environment, for example, ‘quality’. One Specialist articulated this best when he elaborated on outcomes and quality, the synonym so many chose, and in some respects, he confirms dimensions of panopticism in this discourse:

“The outcome (of the training) would be that the quality of scanning and using the Kati handheld would be around 96-98%. This is a minimum level of quality. That drivers understand and make no mistakes. Meet the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Overall, if I order something I expect that we can measure it.”

When asked for a clarification of what benefit the supplier provided and what was ‘value’, C1’s Executive very clearly stated:

“When we make digital content, they can have it quite fast and at the same time, it goes to thousands of people, in different continents. When you can train the people, no matter how many there are, or where they are, it is cost-efficient. Return on investment (ROI) in terms of money. That is one of my sales arguments.”

Comparing the above to Foucault’s dimensions of panopticism, one could associate the exercise of power through several points. For example, e-learning is sold as lowering financial expenditure as it can reach so many people, efficiently. Secondly, as Foucault’s dimensions go, it has breadth of scope, reaching across continents. Add to this the shared or consensual understanding of ‘value’, and there is little in the way of resistance. Thirdly,

compliance is built into some of the respondents' understanding of what 'quality' entails, as the primary dimension of 'value'. This compliance is a form of docility and utility of the drivers, and coincides with Foucault's description of the nature of panopticism (1977).

6.4 Descriptive and prescriptive

As discussed earlier, description is a statement of what ought to be, or not be, while prescription is the act of making what ought to be actually become that which is stated. In the example of baptism or christening within Christian liturgies, it is the deference of the parents to the authority of the priest or pastor that allows the priest to make something come into being. In that case, it is the status of a child as a member of the religious community. In our study, the Executives of both companies have the ability to state what is valuable and value-add. Their subordinates defer to the higher authority by agreeing that the management decide what is of primary importance in the discourse. We see this when C1's Executive clarifies value, as above:

“Return on investment (ROI) in terms of money.”

At the same time, C2's Executive closed the interview with the following about 'value':

“In the business world, it's money, behind that word, always in the end.”

Their roles as senior executives in either company, as well as the deference shown through consensual understandings by the project managers and specialists mirrors the explanation given by Myrdal (2013) above. However, it is not clear that this hegemonic understanding of the word value originates in deference to the executives, to American business theory, business school, or the age-old practice of trading the skins of animals.

7 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the effects of power relations in value discourse in the field of business. I found that the meaning of the concept of value is dependent upon the discursive power and field of the speaker. This finding is in line with earlier studies on the power of discourse (e.g. Oakes et al, 1998), but brings a specific focus on the nature of fields. What is fascinating about this case is the clear delineation between fields. When speaking about fields and capital, Bourdieu (1991) refers to interactions and here we see that the word 'value' is used in the interactions of one field, at work, but not in a different field, that of private life. However, the concept of 'adding value' exists in both fields. For one Specialist, seeing smiles at home as a visual sign of his own value-add. He nonetheless does not link the smiles of co-workers with value-add. He speaks of subordinates' compliance with standards to a level of 96-98% and applicable KPIs. 'Value' is a measurable result, at work.

The concepts of value are numerous (Aschenbrenner 1971) and therefore the word 'value' is polysemic, it has many meanings. The idea of 'value' and its malleable meaning can be used to elicit compliance to processes and standards that benefit certain groups as the Specialist who said:

“That drivers understand and make no mistakes. Meet the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Overall, if I order something I expect that we can measure it.”

Words like 'value', 'quality', 'success', and many other terms can be used to give control; a dominator can change the meaning to suit his or her own goals and preferences, or the goals of the Board/Executive class (Bourdieu 1991, Knights, Morgan 1991). The variability of interpretation can lead to a certain degree of soft tyranny, as each dominator

works under the existing framework of rules, regulations, and standards, but has the ability to direct subordinates towards ‘valued’ ends of his/her preference, as defined by the Executive. This latitude on the part of the dominator to articulate the meaning creates an environment with panoptic dimensions as it allows the possibility that all acts and behaviour within the office could fall under the purview of observation, and be subject to measurement against polysemic words, concepts, or "moving target" standards. Whether behaviour IS measured all the time is irrelevant - but the fact that it could be, and possibly arbitrarily, is what gives control tools their power (Foucault 1977). One could question whether the word ‘value’, or another polysemic word, is introduced as a concept to describe dimensions of outcomes at work, but in the end becomes a tool to control behaviour, unbeknownst even to those using the tool.

Oddly enough, the pedagogically-trained managers at C1 were opening their discussions of ‘value’ with financial indicators such as cost savings or return on investment. This may be necessary due to the language and concepts generally used in business – to create a framework that addresses the buyer’s needs in an understandable manner. However, by forfeiting their authority in the field of pedagogy and learning, it could be an example of embodied symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991), with its inherent deference by the dominated to the dominator. In short, they may be choosing the meaning of ‘value’ based on the preferences of those in control rather than on the basis of their pedagogically-founded beliefs.

On the list of synonyms for ‘value’, many words have calculable dimensions. Earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) is one example. Return on investment (ROI) is another, albeit subject to a certain degree of interpretation. However, the synonym most chosen by the participants was ‘quality’, which also has many meanings and does not have a

mathematical equation or scientific formula to calculate its worth or character. It seems as though people are replacing one polysemic word for another.

The degree to which the concept of ‘value-add’ enters into private life, as spoken of in the interviews, is interesting. One Project Manager refers to ‘value-add’ work provided and paid for during a renovation, but several others spoke of helping friends, raising children, and a general outcome of globalization. The Specialist who used the term ‘social capital’ as something he is putting in the bank, in reference to helping a friend, has touched on another interesting development; the degree to which terminology and concepts move from one field to another. In this case, is the migration of the words ‘value-add’ from work to private life a contamination or a cross-pollination? Imagine if a child would say to his parents, “Your value-add would increase if you would give me money, now!” Seeing others’ behaviour as adding value at work seems rational to many, but the same concept at home can feel mercenary. To transfer vocabulary and concepts such as ‘KPIs’, ‘ROI’, and “What’s the financial value for me in this relationship?” to the field of private life is entirely possible and may in fact occur, but is outside the scope of this study.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This study looked at the field of business and private life with the aim of exploring the effects of power relations, specifically in value discourse. The case with companies C1 and C2 allows the application of several theories. Bourdieu’s field theory (1991) is the framework for comparison, not between companies or classes, but rather between work and private life. The difference in how we use words and concepts in either field speak to power and the embodiment of roles that Foucault (1980) would call ‘dominated’ and

‘dominator’. As certain hegemonic concepts, such as ‘value’, exist at work, there is deference to an unnamed or undesignated authority that describes which meaning amongst many applies in this field. Our two Executives describe ‘value’ in financial terms which speaks to one of Bourdieu’s four types of capital – Economic Capital (1991). As these people are in a dominant position, they also have the ability to take a described dimension of ‘value’ and prescribe it as reality, through the power they exercise as executives, specifically by tracking KPIs, doing performance reviews, increasing salary, or deciding who will be laid-off, etc. As this was simply one case, it would be interesting to see further research on whether or not, or to what degree, executives are cognizant of their role as describer and prescriber, and what are the conditions under which prescription is manifested consciously. Simply put, when does a manager, or anyone exercising power in a field, choose one meaning over others and then enforce it with action?

While the Executives start from a financial perspective, through synonyms and explanations, nearly everyone else defaulted to the synonym ‘quality’. This switch from one word to another, both of which are polysemic, does not actually provide a clear understanding for either word. As one looks at this discourse, it can feel as though there is not a definite meaning, and digging a bit further into it, we find that the Executives’ initial views are also shared by their subordinates. This is illustrated in the Specialist’s desire to have measurable outcomes and KPIs, as well as the Project Manager’s connecting of ‘value’ with ‘a paying customer’. Some participants stated that the concept of value has existed from ancient times. However it is only recently that these words, ‘value-add’ and ‘value’ have entered into the field of business – perhaps in the last 100 years (Smart 1891). Further research could inform us of the degree to which these business terms have also contaminated or cross-pollinated our private lives. From there, it would be interesting to

know if a change in terminology or vocabulary also affects relationships, bringing to one field the associations and underlying psychological or sociological currents of the origin field. As well, the use of one polysemic word for another may mask an unspoken ignorance of concepts and their practical embodiments, or hide a desire to avoid accountability through the use of ambiguous terminology.

Finally, the three dimensions of panopticism: lowest cost, highest efficacy, and increased utility, that Foucault (1977) describes are all quite common terms used in the field of business. However, the field Foucault was referencing was the prison. Having been in a prison with panoptic design, I have experienced the seemingly constant eye of observation. In a similar way, as ‘value’ was often prescribed in financial terms and monitored through Key Performance Indicators, and more specifically as a minimum level of quality so “[t]hat drivers understand and make no mistakes,” we can see how technology and processes can facilitate panopticism in the business field. If and when prisons and companies cross-pollinate or contaminate each other, would be fascinating research. The case does suggest that some dimensions have crossed over between fields, or somehow share commonalities that facilitate similar approaches. Research on other fields that contain these panoptic dimensions, and further investigations into the field of business would be useful for comparison purposes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview questionnaires

Example Interview guide for Suppliers (C1 Ltd.)

Value

- What are you working with? What do you do?

- How long have you worked here/with these tasks?
- What do you provide for your company? Roles and responsibilities?

Background

- What is your education?
- Do you upgrade your skills? How?
- What does your company do?
- What do you want to provide for your clients? Can you give examples?
- What business problem does your service solve? How do you prove that you have solved that problem?
- What expectations do customers have of you?
- Name three...?
- Why do customers choose you instead of doing it themselves?
- Why do they choose you instead of a competitor?
- Are there things embedded in your service/product that are valuable but not seen by the customer? Such as...?
- Can you tell a story about a case where the customer received what they expected and what it was they believe they received?

The actual case example.

- The “KATI” handheld e-learning module that C1 created/is creating for C2...
- Can you explain what C1 is providing?
- What were the original objectives or desired outcomes from your planning sessions?
- Have the objectives changed?
- Are there differences between your outcomes and the customers? Explain...
- If you are increasing value or adding value to your Customer’s business – what is that in concrete or abstract terms?

- How do you measure success in the KATI project? Do you have metrics or some other way to see if you have reached your goals?

Dimensions of value

- What are dimensions of value: synonyms paper, please circle 3-4 that relate closely to the word 'value'

Where does it come from?

- In private life, outside of work with friends or family, do you use the term value or value-add? Or the synonyms you circled, when discussing something that is (better?) than before? IF yes, give an example...
- Are there other terms we use in our private life to describe the same concept as 'value'? If so, what are they?
- From where do you think you learned the word value, as it is used at work?
- Do you have any other thoughts on 'value' or 'value-add' that you'd like to share?

Appendix 2: Synonyms of 'value'

A list of synonyms for 'value' from daily work of the author and (Random House 1984):

Amount	Outcome
Cost	Efficiency
Strength	Effectiveness
Expense	Quality
Comfort	Speed
Benefit	Mistake-free
Price	Satisfies
Profit	Meet KPIs
R.O.C.E.	Ease of use
Rate	Participant response
Appraisal	Skills acquired
Assessment	
Charge	
Equivalent	
Market price	
R.O.I.	
Monetary worth	
Result	
Preference	
Relevance	